



Advocates For Consumer Rights

www.scottfoster.org/afcr

Working for Hawaii's consumers since 1994

George Fox, President ~ 808-447-9424 ~ gfox@hawaii.rr.com

Scott Foster, Communications ~ Director 808-988-0555 ~ afcr@hawaii.rr.com

iLind.net

ian Lind online daily from Kasewa, Hawaii

May 18th, 2009

RECEIVED
MAY 18 1 24 PM '09
CITY CLERK
HONOLULU, HAWAII

Monday... \$1 Billion in Rail funds included in CIP budget..09

A special meeting of the Honolulu City Council Budget Committee is being held this morning to consider several budget bills, including the mayor's capital improvements budget (Bill 16), where the first billion (with a B) dollars to fund the initial transit contracts appear. It's important to keep in mind that these contracts, if not amended, (a) will lock the city into a particular type of train based on the mayor's own specifications, and (b) will not be eligible for any federal reimbursement because the funds are being committed before federal approvals are obtained. It's hard to tell at this point whether the American Institute of Architects' growing call for changes to the design that would make the rail system more cost effective, easier to complete, and more user and community friendly, are gaining enough political traction to make a difference. I hope so, but some people say the key decisions have already been made. Not so, or, more properly, at least they haven't been made on the up & up.

In January, 2007, the council declared a "locally preferred alternative" which would run on a "fixed guideway". No problem. That's what AIA wants. And the bill establishing the "locally preferred alternative" explicitly said that the choice of specific technology still had to be made. Further, the council at that time recognized that the administration was (or was at risk of) manipulating the specifications of the system. As a result, the bill required that design specifications receive the council's prior approval before being adopted. Although the provision for prior review was later challenged (and changed) on other grounds, the council's intent was clear.

And, later in 2007, when the city laid out the scope of its environmental impact study, it said clearly that the technology had not yet been selected and that comments on that technology choice should be delayed until the EIS was completed. And when the mayor's technology selection panel met and made a choice, it recommended "steel wheel on steel rail". Good. The AIA has no problem with that recommendation, as the technology it supports falls within that category.

Despite all that, Mayor Mufi is now telling us that the environmental impact study was all shibai, that it was never intended to really study alternatives, and that the decisions have all been made and those with environmental concerns should just get lost and get out of the way and let his pet design roll. All the while, of course, using photos and video of the systems favored by the AIA to sell the public on the idea of transit, even though those depictions are of a type of transit technology the mayor is trying to prevent from being adopted here. Isn't politics something else? I noticed that there have been two last minute changes in the fast-track schedule for the two contracts currently out for bids. The first change was announced last Wednesday, then on Friday that was thrown out and replaced with another schedule. There's obviously a story behind these changes, but I don't know what it is or whose ox is gored in the process.

-###-

MISC. COM. 1034

B